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# THE LABORER AND THE BOCHOUR AND THE SMYTH

*To the Editors of Mod. Lang. Notes.*

SIRS:—The common readings of MSS. Ellesmere and Gg, as given by Koch,<sup>1</sup> are often highly interesting. Professor Koch classes a considerable number of passages as doubtful, "in which, it seems, we have to recognize the original form of the text, somehow neglected or defaced by Ell., Gg." It may be instructive to examine one of these "doubtful" passages, in order to understand the practice of the author of these contaminations in the Chaucer text. Lines A2024–2026 in Ell., Gg read:

"There were also of Martes division  
The laborer and the bochour and the smyth  
That forgeth sharpe swerdes on his styth."

The other principal MSS. of the *Tales* read "barbour" for "laborer."

Wright and Skeat have pointed out the connection between users of metal tools, especially edged ones, and the protection of Mars. Chaucer's use of the "barbour" as "of Martes division" was natural enough. Why, then, the change in Ell., Gg, which is against both metrical and alliterative use?

There must have been in the mind of the scribe an idea that a barber was no fit servant of Mars. Perhaps he turned to his *Vegetius*, where he read some such statement as the following, which I copied from a Scottish version of a century later:

"barbouris, sootaris, writaris, and tailgeoris, and yair avin craft beweill considerit, yai ar na worth for battell, for he may never weill stryke with ax or swerd yat suld have a licht hand to hold rasour, nedill, or pen; for quhat proportione is of a nedill till a speir, or rasour or pen till ane ax?"<sup>2</sup>

Vegetius vouched sufficiently, on the other hand, for the butcher and the smith.

"Smythes, writhtis, masonis, ar profitabell to battell werkes . . . and sa ar bouchouris, for yai abhor nocht ye schedding of blude. . . ."

<sup>1</sup> *A Detailed Comparison of the Eight Manuscripts of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, by John Koch, Ph.D. Heidelberg, 1913, pp. 83–89.

<sup>2</sup> Extracts printed by the writer in *Kittredge Anniversary Papers*, pp. 402–403.

Vegetius, again, must have been authority for the change of "laborer" for "barbour," the substitution best for sound and sense alike. In the original the scribe must have read:

Lib. I, cap. III. Sequitur ut, utrum de agris, an de urbibus utilior tiro sit, requiramus. De qua parte numquam credo potuisse dubitari, *aptiorem armis rusticam plebem, quae sub divo et in labore nutritur.*<sup>3</sup>

It would thus appear, from the passages cited, that one at least of the Ell., Gg contaminations can hardly be due to neglect or wilful defacement, the two causes assigned by Koch. Such careful alteration would nowadays be classed under "critical emendation."

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## EIN UNBEKANNTER ENGLISCHER FAUST- BUCHDRUCK

*An der Redaktion der Mod. Lang. Notes.*

Nicht unwillkommen dürfte für die Forscher der englischen Faustbücherliteratur die Mitteilung sein, dass zu den verhältnismässig wenigen englischen Faustbücherdrucken noch ein bisher unbekannter hinzugefügt werden kann. Er befindet sich in den Sammlungen der Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris und ist überhaupt das einzige von den deutschen, holländischen und englischen Faust-Wagnervolksbüchern, das die genannte Bibliothek besitzt. Inventaire E. 2338 (5). London, John Wright 1634, 4°. Grösse: 19.5 x 14.2 cm. (beim Einbinden beschnitten, die ursprüngliche Breite dürfte sich auf 15.2 cm. belaufen). Titel: The || Historie || of || the damnable || life / and deserved || death of doctor || John Faustus. || Newly printed and in convenient places / imperfect || matter amended: according to the true copie printed || at Frankfort: and translated into English/ || By P. R. Gent. || (Holzschnitt: Ein Zauberer ein Buch und einen Stab haltend inmitten eines Kreises, dessen Umfang in Abschnitte geteilt ist. Jeder von diesen enthält ein astrologisches Zeichen. Ausserhalb des Kreises steigt ein Teufel aus der Erde heraus

<sup>3</sup> *Fl. Vegetii Renati De Re Militari Lib. V; ed. Schwebel, 1806, p. 6.*